

COMMITTEE:	East Lothian Council
MEETING DATE:	9 December 2025
BY:	Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities
REPORT TITLE:	Delivery of Early Learning and Childcare
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report updates East Lothian Council on the changes to the delivery of Early Learning and Childcare from August 2026.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the change in delivery models at Longniddry, East Linton, Aberlady, Law, Sanderson's Wynd, Pinkie St Peter's and Yester Nursery settings to deliver a high quality and resilient service.
- 2.2 Note the progress already made including individual discussions with staff and families.
- 2.3 Note the commitment to present interim childcare proposals to families by end January 2026 to mitigate the effects of the changes where possible, in order to support transition for children and families.
- 2.4 Note the areas for further development including a scoping exercise to assess the viability of introducing charging for extra hours in Council settings, and the possibility of extended summer provision in the longer term.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the funded Early Learning and Childcare entitlement is available for all eligible children in

their area (East Lothian). Legislation¹ states that the local authority has a duty to provide sufficient places across the authority for eligible children; East Lothian Council will continue to meet this duty with the proposed change in delivery models by providing adequate Early Learning and Childcare, in an equitable way, for eligible children in East Lothian whose parents wish a place. Early Learning and Childcare is not allocated on a catchment basis, with families being able to apply to access their Early Learning and Childcare funded entitlement in available settings across their local authority or in other local authorities across Scotland. This also applies to families in neighbouring authorities applying for places in East Lothian provisions. Families are not guaranteed to get their first choice of setting and may have to travel to an alternative setting.

- 3.2 Current models of delivery of Early Learning and Childcare can be seen here:

https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210642/early_learning_and_childcare/12629/early_learning_and_childcare_in_east_lothian

- 3.3 Since the increase in Early Learning and Childcare provision to 1140 hours in 2021, we have continued to adapt our service offer to best meet a wide variety of need, maintain high standards as well as ensuring we have a resilient service and are an attractive employer. Early Learning and Childcare is 'provider neutral' and to help us continue to deliver a flexible service, we have worked in partnership to seek to expand the number of externally funded provisions including our 14 funded private nurseries and 24 childminders. It is interesting to note that 75% of local authorities offer term-time only provision for 1140 hours.

- 3.4 We continue to regularly review the delivery of the service using a variety of data sources, including:

- Appendix 1 Holiday Period Usage
- Appendix 2 Full Year Usage – End of Day Pick-Up
- staffing of 48-week settings, including daily availability as well as recruitment
- Early Learning and Childcare as a provider neutral service – number of notes of interest from new funded providers to deliver funded EL&CC in East Lothian
- future demand for places linked to the local development plan
- operating the service within the allocated budget

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2014/08/early-learning-childcare-statutory-guidance/documents/00457025-pdf/00457025-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00457025.pdf>

Year	Budget
2021-2022	15,850,000
2022-2023	16,993,420
2023-2024	16,678,000
2024-2025	16,580,000
2025-2026	17,390,000

Changes to Delivery from August 2026

3.5 From August 2026, the delivery of Early Learning and Childcare will be adapted to take account of the following factors:

- provide high quality early learning and childcare to best meet children's needs
- better reflect the demand and uptake of Early Learning and Childcare entitlement across our settings based on all available data
- deliver best value for the Council and communities
- reorganise staffing structures for sustainability
- optimise capacity across settings for future growth, including Private Voluntary and Independent sector partners
- meet increasing demands for placements across our area, including eligible two-year old children (E2)
- provide equitable parental choice and utilisation of full-year provisions alongside expansion of our term-time only models.

3.6 These changes will also offer:

- an improved adult:child staff ratio and skills mix in settings, ensuring continuing full compliance with Care Inspectorate standards and expectations, supporting the quality and consistency of care and learning
- rationalisation of underused settings to create equitable experiences of Early Learning and Childcare (2-5 years) across the local authority, thereby improving sustainability
- the ability to redirect resources strategically to settings to meet our Early Learning and Childcare legislative duties
- planning based on a locality model (although Early Learning and Childcare does not operate on a locality basis) taking account of all available options available to families in line with the Scottish Government's 'provider neutral' context
- a 48-week model in each area alongside a range of funded providers

- 3.7 In June 2023, Audit Scotland² published a report on the progress of delivery of 1140 hours. It outlines that *'parents can expect to have some choice over where their child attends ELC and the pattern in which that ELC is provided. However, the degree of choice is determined by what is offered in each parent's council area, and, although these options should be based on the findings of consultations with local parents, they may not reflect the individual needs of all families. In addition, choice is limited by the space available in ELC settings, so popular choices may be over-subscribed. Councils are working to increase the flexibility and choice available to parents. However, parents may not always get a place for their child at the setting of their choice, or with their ideal pattern of hours.'*

Engagement With Staff

- 3.8 Two separate but closely linked Service Reviews are currently underway to ensure Early Learning and Childcare remains sustainable and responsive to future needs. Significant engagement with staff has already been undertaken, which has included relevant professional associations.

Early Years Central Team Review

This Service Review is focused on rationalising the central team. This is the second review of the team since August 2024, and will effect a further saving to the service of approximately £350,000. Delivery models are not impacted by this review.

Delivery Model Review

This Service Review addresses the realignment of delivery models to create sustainable staffing structures that meet the needs of our growing communities. This Service Review will not result in any savings to the service as budget has not been a driver for the changes to delivery models.

Both reviews are essential to balance affordability, quality and flexibility as demand continues to rise.

To date, there are 66 staff affected by the planned changes to delivery. Of these, 42 have already volunteered to change their hours with individual discussions ongoing with the remaining staff. There are no planned redundancies as the model also includes a peripatetic bank of staff who would be available to cover leave and absence.

² <https://audit.scot/publications/early-learning-and-childcare-progress-on-delivery-of-the-1140-hours-expansion>

Engagement with Families

- 3.9 The service acknowledges that it has not consulted widely enough with parents and carers in detail about the specific changes. As a result of reflection and learning we will develop our communication and engagement with families from each setting. This will include opportunities for families to engage with the Early Years Team on an ongoing basis. In addition, the service has made every effort to engage on an individual basis with families to discuss their own circumstances and to outline options available to them.

A number of enquiries from parents and carers have been received:

Feedback Classification	Number
Enquiry	6
Service Request	61
Stage 1 Complaint	16
Stage 2 Complaint	8
FOI	15

A number of separate communications from both parents/ carers and staff who are supportive of the changes has also been received.

A meeting of representative parents/carers from the affected settings took place on Tuesday 25 November and feedback gathered has contributed to the planning for next steps detailed below.

Other Developments

- 3.10 Alongside the changes being made to service delivery from August 2026, and in response to feedback, a range of other developments are being progressed:
- engage by 19 December with each affected setting to assess local implications of the change of delivery model
 - present interim childcare proposals to families by end January 2026 to mitigate the effects of the changes where possible, in order to support transition for children and families
 - agree next steps by end February 2026 with each family of a child registered in an affected setting in August/ September 2025 and planning to continue in Session 2026/27
 - review the Equalities Impact Assessment to ensure that it fully captures all potential impacts and necessary mitigations by end January 2026
 - scope viability of charging for extra hours in Council settings including the possibility of extended summer provision by end April 2026

- continue to onboard further funded providers to increase availability of blended placements
- increase provision for Eligible 2 children, which will support families with the lowest income
- increase numbers of spaces from August 2026 in the following settings:

Capacity Changes from August 2026 – 48-week Delivery Model

Setting	Current Overall Capacity	Overall Capacity from Aug 2026	Total Capacity Change
Gullane PS	64 (32/32)	96 (48/48)	32 (16/16)
Wallyford PS	176 (88/88)	192 (96/96)	16 (8/8)
Dunbar PS	224 (112/112)	288 (144/144)	64 (32/32)

Capacity Changes - Delivery Model change from 48 week to 38 week from August 2026 following expansion and refurbishment

Setting	Current Overall Daily Capacity 48-week model	Overall Daily Capacity from Aug 2026 38-week model
Longniddry PS	30	64
Aberlady PS	16	40

These developments have the potential to further increase flexibility for all families.

Conclusion

- 3.11 Work is now well underway towards full implementation of the delivery models from August 2026, at which time the seven settings referenced above will change from 48 to 38-week provision. This includes changes to staff contracts.
- 3.12 We are aiming to provide greater certainty for families and staff as detailed above, and do not anticipate any further changes to our delivery models for at least the next five years. These changes will ensure we can deliver high quality, flexible and sustainable Early Learning and Childcare that secures best value for the Council within the allocated budget for Early Learning and Childcare.
- 3.13 The March Education and Children's Services Committee Report will confirm progress and arrangements for August 2026.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-2020-expansion-early-learning-childcare-scotland-2017-18-action/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-child-national-standard-early-learning-childcare-providers-operating-guidance-3/pages/1/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-child-national-standard-early-learning-childcare-providers-operating-guidance-3/pages/1/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-child-national-standard-early-learning-childcare-providers-guidance-meeting-criteria-7-business-sustainability/>

5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Finance:

The Early Years budget over the last 5 years has been as follows:

Year	Budget
2021-2022	15,850,000
2022-2023	16,993,420
2023-2024	16,678,000
2024-2025	16,580,000
2025-2026	17,390,000

Reductions have been made to the Early Years budget as approved by East Lothian Council as follows:

Year	Amount	Area
2022-23	-1,208,000	National reduction to 1140 hours budget
2023-24	-216,000	ELCC - Scot Govt budget reduction
2023-24	-15,000	ELCC - Scot Govt specific grant reduction
2023-24	-189,000	Remove remaining

		GAE 1140 hrs budget
2024-25	-306,000	Service Review

- 5.2 Human Resources: Staff under Service Review are fully supported by HR and Professional Associations (EIS, UNISON, VOICE)
- 5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None
- 5.4 Risk: As outlined in the Integrated Impact Assessment

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 ***Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.***

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

☐

or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

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Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	x
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	x
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	x
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	x
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report has been published and can be accessed via the Council's website:

https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments

7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1: Holiday Period Usage

7.2 Appendix 2: Full Year Usage – End of Day Pick-Up

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

Report Author(s)

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Date	1 December 2025

Head of Service Approval

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Designation	Depute Chief Executive – Resources and Economy
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	Confirmed
Approval Date	1 December 2025

% Attendance Rates by LA Setting and Holiday Period (% uptake of total children on nursery roll)

CLUSTER / HOLIDAY		LA Setting	Oct-22	Feb-23	Apr-23	May-23	Summer-23	Oct-23	Feb-24	Apr-24	May-24	Summer-24	Oct-24	Feb-25	Apr-25	May-25	Summer-25	% Average all holidays
Dunbar	Dunbar PS		59%	69%	65%	70%	67%	65%	71%	72%	69%	64%	59%	69%	71%	77%	70%	68%
	East Linton PS		62%	68%	61%	80%	56%	70%	69%	73%	75%	60%	66%	78%	68%	75%	65%	68%
Dunbar Total			61%	69%	63%	75%	62%	68%	70%	73%	72%	62%	63%	74%	70%	76%	68%	68%
Haddington	Haddington		56%	63%	64%	65%	72%	56%	72%	62%	58%	63%	68%	70%	57%	60%	68%	64%
	Letham Mains		73%	78%	88%	80%	84%	80%	80%	82%	79%	84%	76%	82%	79%	78%	80%	80%
	St Mary's		81%	73%	76%	80%	79%	63%	75%	77%	100%	64%	64%	70%	70%	74%	65%	74%
	Yester		53%	55%	40%	63%	43%	38%	52%	46%	60%	49%	59%	69%	57%	65%	52%	53%
Haddington Total			66%	67%	67%	72%	70%	59%	70%	67%	74%	65%	67%	73%	66%	69%	66%	68%
Musselburgh	Stoneyhill		70%	79%	85%	63%	80%	76%	89%	84%	100%	82%	75%	94%	82%	83%	82%	82%
Musselburgh Total			35%	40%	43%	32%	40%	38%	45%	42%	50%	41%	38%	47%	41%	42%	41%	41%
North Berwick	Aberlady		83%	80%	81%	81%	74%	71%	86%	86%	88%	73%	71%	82%	75%	88%	70%	79%
	Gullane		70%	77%	84%	84%	70%	71%	79%	75%	67%	70%	80%	79%	73%	44%	69%	73%
	Law		62%	67%	68%	72%	64%	63%	69%	74%	71%	67%	59%	80%	78%	60%	75%	69%
North Berwick Total			72%	75%	78%	79%	69%	68%	78%	78%	75%	70%	70%	80%	75%	64%	71%	74%
Prestonpans	Longniddry		69%	73%	78%	75%	74%	75%	72%	74%	100%	76%	74%	76%	79%	83%	69%	76%
	Preston Tower		64%	64%	89%	67%	60%	59%	55%	60%	61%	47%	44%	45%	61%	59%	50%	59%
Prestonpans Total			67%	69%	84%	71%	67%	67%	64%	67%	81%	62%	59%	61%	70%	71%	60%	68%
Wallyford	Pinkie St Peter's		65%	66%	62%	68%	65%	61%	52%	67%	98%	63%	71%	65%	68%	62%	60%	66%
	Wallyford		84%	71%	78%	46%	60%	65%	74%	82%	64%	71%	69%	80%	75%	71%	71%	71%
Wallyford Total			75%	69%	70%	57%	63%	63%	63%	75%	81%	67%	70%	73%	72%	67%	66%	68%
Tranent	Ormiston		65%	76%	76%	83%	73%	70%	47%	78%	80%	66%	66%	67%	69%	77%	65%	71%
	Sanderson's Wynd		51%	60%	65%	61%	62%	42%	54%	52%	49%	53%	64%	69%	59%	54%	55%	57%
	Windygoul		71%	82%	68%	74%	44%	66%	74%	65%	78%	66%	72%	82%	77%	86%	74%	72%
Tranent Total			62%	73%	70%	73%	60%	59%	58%	65%	69%	62%	67%	73%	68%	72%	65%	66%
Average across East Lothian			67%	70%	68%	65%	61%	60%	64%	67%	72%	61%	62%	68%	66%	66%	62%	65%

% Collection Rates after 15.30 by LA Setting (% uptake of total children on nursery roll)

CLUSTER	LA Setting	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Dunbar	Dunbar PS	59%	58%	79%	64%
	East Linton PS	63%	79%	67%	54%
Dunbar					
Haddington	Haddington	38%	38%	41%	45%
	Letham Mains	76%	81%	71%	71%
	St Mary's	51%	37%	39%	38%
	Yester *	26%	11%	25%	19%
Haddington					
Musselburgh	Stoneyhill	29%	60%	61%	49%
Musselburgh					
North Berwick	Aberlady	70%	63%	60%	48%
	Gullane	67%	70%	72%	64%
	Law	53%	59%	66%	71%
North Berwick					
Prestonpans	Longniddry	42%	47%	62%	63%
	Preston Tower	44%	46%	30%	44%
Prestonpans					
Wallyford	Pinkie St Peter's	46%	55%	59%	45%
	Wallyford	59%	51%	55%	51%
Wallyford					
Tranent	Ormiston	47%	53%	50%	75%
	Sanderson's Wynd *	13%	29%	34%	40%
	Windygoul	51%	57%	59%	48%
Tranent					

*From August 2023 delivery model changed to shorter days over the full year